

(Washington, DC)— Congresswoman Gwen Moore today hailed the decision of the Senate Committee on Appropriations to include Milwaukee's Zablocki VA Medical Center on a list of veterans medical facilities slated to receive funding for significant structural refurbishment and technological upgrades. Zablocki, a major veterans' facility in Wisconsin's Fourth Congressional District, had been placed on a priority list by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) in February to receive \$32.5 million for a new Spinal Cord Injury Unit (SCI) in the 2007 budget. However, in May the House Committee on Appropriations released its version of next year's budget allocations without including Zablocki, a decision that was decried as totally out of step with both the priorities of the VA as well as the most urgent medical needs of veterans with spinal cord injuries across the nation.

"Many thanks to Wisconsin Senator Herb Kohl for making sure this funding for Zablocki was included in the Senate's military construction appropriations bill," said Congresswoman Gwen Moore. "The Department whose job is to care for paralyzed veterans told us this was their first priority. This Zablocki SCI unit is one of only 23 SCI units in the country, serving more than 500 veterans as inpatients and over 10,000 outpatients each year."

Congresswoman Moore has been a strong advocate for Zablocki Medical Center, its patients, and its staff, calling on the VA to list it as a priority in its proposed budget and immediately offering an amendment on the floor of the House last May to reinstate the funding for Zablocki in the House military construction appropriations bill. Moore has vowed to work with Senator Herb Kohl, Ranking Member David Obey, and the rest of the Wisconsin delegation to make every effort to ensure that the funding makes its way into the final House-Senate appropriations conference report.

### **BACKGROUND ON ZABLOCKI MEDICAL CENTER**

Zablocki Medical Center is the only VA unit that treats spinal cord injuries in Wisconsin, and only one of 23 in the United States, with its spinal cord injury unit treating approximately 500 veterans as inpatients and providing service to 10,000 outpatients annually. The \$32.5 million in funding will improve patient care, maximize patient services and quality of life as it creates a new building that will include 38 patient beds. The new SCI unit will help thousands of veterans deal with irreversible paraplegia and quadriplegia, disabilities that are catastrophic to both veterans and their families.

The existing Spinal Cord Injury Unit at the Milwaukee VA Medical Center was established in 1972. The SCI unit is on two retrofitted acute care wards on the 10th floor of the Medical Center. Limitations of space and technology in the current location have made it impossible to keep the SCI unit abreast of the evolution of SCI medicine over the past thirty-three years. These facilities do not currently meet the current standards as set by JCAHO, the VA's space criteria, or the life and safety evacuation criteria. As of now, the SCI unit does not have rooms that were built to contain all the equipment needed by the veteran as he/she works to achieve optimal independence, and the unit's multi-patient rooms make it virtually impossible to meet expectations for patient privacy.

Even with the limited space and outdated technology, the SCI unit at Zablocki VA Medical Center boasts a very dedicated staff. The structural upgrades and new equipment afforded by this funding will bring Zablocki up to speed with the spatial and technology requirements that are needed to ensure that the staff can serve our veterans properly and more efficiently.

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